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ABSTRACT

The Laboratory School in Bielefeld, Germany, is an experimental school that is part of the University of Bielefeld. The Laboratory School is an integrated comprehensive school for children aged 5-16 years. Pupils are not separated by streaming and do not receive letter grades until their 10th year of school. The Laboratory School makes extensive use of the possibilities to learn and experience the environment outside the school to promote a concept of lifelong learning based on the following types of learning: (1) learning to acquire knowledge; (2) learning to act; (3) learning to live together; and (4) learning for life. The Laboratory School defines its philosophy of "opening of school" as transcending a school's traditional borders to forge closer links with the surrounding communities and using the opportunities there to learn and experience. Examples of the school's implementation of this philosophy include the Labyrinth Project (a cross-subject project in which art, language, and math lessons are focused on labyrinths) and the German-French Intercultural Encounter Projekt (a cultural exchange and foreign language program during which primary-grade students spend 10-14 days at a partner school in Paris). The school's teachers' are encouraged to pursue lifelong learning by pursuing professional development opportunities and trying new methods in their practice. (Contains 13 references.) (MN)

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Opening of School and Lifelong Learning — 25 Years of Experience

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Opening of school and Lifelong Learning - 25 Years of Experience

We have been requested to report on our practical experience at an unusual school, the Laboratory School in Bielefeld. This school is an experimental school which is a part of the University of Bielefeld. First a few facts about the school: it is an integrated comprehensive school for children five through 16 years old. The pupils are not separated by streaming - this means potential Gymnasium pupils are in the same group with pupils who have disabilities. Until the ninth school year, instead of the usual practice of giving the children number or letter grades for their work, the Laboratory School gives them descriptive verbal reports . Only in their last school year do they get the kinds of grades given in other school forms. Upon completion of the tenth school year, the pupils receive the usual school leaving certificates.
The Laboratory School was founded in 1974 by Hartmut von Hentig and this year (1999) it will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary (v. Hentig 1995; Thurn/Tillmann 1997).

A central goal of Laboratory School education is reflected in the many different attempts to transcend the limitations of the „traditional" school. Our school does this by making use of possibilities to learn and experience in the environment outside the school. We are convinced that this makes an important contribution to lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning and Formal School Education

In preparation for this talk we first asked ourselves: what does „lifelong learning" mean for schools? Extremely helpful was the report of the independent international Commission on „Education in the 21st Century". The commission emphasizes that lifelong learning will play a key role in education in the coming century. Jacque Delors, Chairman of the Commission, calls lifelong learning the „heartbeat of society" - in present as well as in future societies.

The Commission bases its concept of lifelong learning on four basic kinds of learning:

- *Learning to acquire knowledge*, that is, the possibility to learn how to understand;
- *Learning to act*, that is, to learn to master activities and skills in order to be able to work creatively in one's own environment;
- *Learning to live together*, to be able to participate in all human activities and to be able to work with others;
- and *Learning for life*, to be able to live life fully.

The Commission believes that in „every organized form of learning, each one of these four pillars requires the same amount of attention" (1997, p. 73, 74). The concept of lifelong learning goes much beyond traditional ideas of formal school education: it requires a linking of learning with work and with life. The foundations for lifelong learning can be provided in schools. For this to be possible, it is essential that schools open themselves to experiences to be gained outside of school, that pathways and bridges that facilitate movement between education, and work and life be created. Opening of school means that a school transcends its traditional borders in order to forge closer links with the surrounding communities and use the opportunities there to learn and experience.

By opening itself up to the outside, school also opens up on the inside - the step in one direction is unimaginable without a step in the other.

We would like to add four important points regarding opening of school :

- First, „opening of school" is not a completely new concept, but one which has long been current in educational reform. It has been put into practice in open instruction, in the neighborhood school and in community education.
- Second, it is an extremely useful concept for the school of today and for the school of the future, a concept which deals with the crisis of the meaning of school and its functional change.
- It is not a peripheral idea, nor is it one linked just to the pedagogy of one subject area or to the teaching methods of one school level, but an idea which is central to the very concept of the institution of school.
- It is also a practice-oriented school program for the development of the individual school (Reinhardt 1992; Holtappels 1994).

So much for the basic concept. The focus in our presentation is not on various concepts of lifelong learning, nor on different ideas regarding the „Opening of school" but instead we try to provide an answer to the following question:

What kinds of experiences can schools have when they attempt to link the areas of learning, work, and life? How can schools open up to the outside and in this way support the process of lifelong learning?

In answering this question, we will portray the experiences of „our" school, the Laboratory School in Bielefeld. But first, we would like to describe what our school understands under „Opening of school".

„Opening of school" - the concept as understood by the Laboratory School

The Laboratory School Bielefeld is a unique school in Germany. It is a school which is part of the university, and it works in close cooperation with the department of education on educational reform.

The school has been gaining experience with the „opening of school" for a quarter of a century - ever since 1974, a time when educational reform in German schools was gaining impetus. It was conceived from the very beginning as an „open school". Its founder and head of research for many years, Hartmut von Hentig, spoke of school as a place for children and young people to live and to gain experience in, as „a place to grow up in". He questioned the extent to which schools can be „de-schooled" and whether there can be basic alternatives to the public school. "Even an open school is still a school", is how one could describe his position. The Laboratory School was intended to be open to the outside and - at least as important - also on the inside. Hentig promoted the opening of school not only towards life in the region, in the neighborhood, in the community, but also the opening of the physical setting of the school room and of school life itself. In line with John Dewey's idea, he thought of school as a community where there are no rigid lines between learning and living, a place which is open for all of its members. Opening of school thus means: opening of school toward the outside community and the opening of school as a community itself.

Has this idea become reality and - if yes - how? Several years before concepts like „school program", „school development" and „school profile" became popular in the German discussions in education, the Laboratory School had already formulated and written its own school program (1979, revised in 1988). In addition to the basic goals of the school, the school program provides details as to how the opening of school is actually anchored in the curriculum of the school (Eise/ v.d. Groeben/ Lenzen 1994). At this point, we would like to give you just a brief overview:

- First, the physical setting for learning: it is not simply a conglomeration of classrooms, but includes space for learning opportunities in a variety of settings: for example, the small school zoo, the library, the adventure playground, the workshops where kids can work during recess, the school discotheque, the tearoom and the school garden.
- the school's curriculum: in particular levels of the school, phases have been set aside in which regular school instruction is replaced by learning in the environment around the school. For example, in the eighth school year, the pupils complete a three-week long practicum (or internship) in a company or factory devoted to production; in the ninth school year, they do a practicum in a service organization or in administration; and in the last school year, in preparation for school or work after they leave the Laboratory School, they complete a practicum in either a different school form or in some kind of vocational training.
- A project week takes place each year. During this week the pupils and teachers in all the levels concentrate on one common theme. Each study group makes its own contribution. Project-oriented learning frequently takes the children into the environment of the school; for example, to an archive, to the theater, museums, to the employment office, or to the market. This also often leads to an opening of the school on the inside: in the project groups the kids work together across age groups.
- Further, the Laboratory School is a member in the group of Unesco-Project Schools. We have partnerships with schools in Nicaragua; we cooperate (under the auspices of the Comenius-Program) with schools in England, Sweden and Finnland, Italy and France. This creates many opportunities for visits, exchange of information, concerts and readings.
- Through these school partnerships, the Laboratory School has developed a special *Travel Curriculum* : each group, even the very youngest children, take a trip once a year for several days: to a farm, to the ocean, to another city or even to another country. The ski trip in the seventh school year and the trip to a foreign country in the ninth school year take place annually.
- During the school year, there are a series of celebrations and special events: Open House Day, the ceremony at the end of the school year for the graduates of the Laboratory School, the School Festival, the Matinee of the Nicaragua-Group, the Sports and Games Day and so on.
- Besides all this, there are - depending on what the program is - changing contacts to institutions outside of school. The Advanced Course in German performed a play in Bielefeld's city theater during „School Theater Week"; and in the „Third-World-House" the school offered an informational program with the theme „the rights of children".

One basic experience that we have had while establishing so many different forms of opening of school is: these different forms of learning can make the curriculum of the school vital and exciting, but they should be firmly anchored in the school's program. This alone is not a guarantee for success, however. Opening processes are also highly dependent on the personalities of the teachers involved, on their motivation, their interests and their abilities.

„Opening of School" - Two Examples

Let us look at two examples of opening processes in the Laboratory School. In the everyday life of the school not all opening processes are as elaborate and complicated as these two examples. We chose these because they reveal certain structural elements of opening processes in an especially clear way.

Example 1: the „Labyrinth-Project". The first example is a cross-subject project in the eighth school year (Ehlers/Schluckebier/Wachendorff 1988). This project took place in the immediate environment of the school; however, in the course of the project the pupils also moved to settings beyond the school premises.

In their art, language and math lessons the pupils in the eighth school year concentrated on the theme „Labyrinth". They planned various forms of labyrinths, became acquainted with the history of the Minotaur and searched through museums and books for different kinds of labyrinths. As von Hentig explained in his commentary in the film (v.Hentig/Kätsch/Kosiek 1988) on the project, the pupils became experts on the topic of the labyrinth. After preparing the project thoroughly, they began to build their own labyrinth at a location next to the school. It was intended to be a present for the younger children of the school, a place for them to play in. The design chosen for construction of the labyrinth was the one which had won first prize in a competition within the school. It covered an area of 11 x 11 meters and was constructed with low walls. Under the guidance of a mason from the vocational training center in Bielefeld the pupils built the walls using bricks. They - and also their teachers - learned to carry out their plans according to scale, to cut bricks and break them apart, to mix mortar and to build the walls using the appropriate tools. The entire process involved various other kinds of research and activities both inside and outside the school. The girls and boys visited a brick yard where they experienced the fully automatic process of brick-making and saw how bricks are stored.

The film about this project portrays the changing settings and changing activities in various stages of the opening process:

- The physical setting in which the activities take place vary from acitivities in the school, outside in front of the school, in a museum, in the vocational training center in Bielefeld, in a factory - and finally back in the school, and in the classroom, the chemistry lab.
- The activities of the pupils vary: they work in different ways in different settings: they devise a plan, they learn how to work with the necessary tools, they build a wall, they visit a brickyard, they experiment and they write it all down in a report.
- The activities of the teachers are also complex: they organize the whole project and guide the individual phases; they construct the wall right along with the children; they offer concrete help; and they are ready to give up their role at various times to other experts, and finally, they are learners themselves.

The transitions from one setting for learning to another are all anchored in the project's plan as are the changing forms of activity. The entire process has a highly complex structure; it requires good organization and many different instructional materials (from paper to cement, to sand and bricks).

We see: the popular slogan „Open the schools and let life in" is a little misleading. School does not open itself all by itself; it *is* opened in a planful way, in selected steps and informed

by a basic underlying concept. The opening process is deliberately staged; it is a conscious and well organized attempt to organize school learning in a new way.

Example 2: The German-French Intercultural Encounter Projekt. Our next example was carried out at the primary school level, in the third, fourth and fifth school years and is part of the school's travel curriculum. Since 1976 the German-French Youth Association has promoted a program in which primary school classes of the two countries get to know each other. It is a program devoted to cultural learning and to acquainting the children with a foreign language. The Laboratory School cooperated with other schools in developing and in evaluating the program - under the official rubric „foreign language motivation" (Büttner/Lenzen/Schulz 1995).

Each year a German primary school class from Bielefeld visits its partner school in Paris. The visit usually lasts between ten and fourteen days. One year the visit takes place in France and the following year the French pupils come to Germany. Before the visit takes place, the teachers of both schools plan the program together. They arrange a so-called „third meeting place" at a youth hostel or camp, where the visit will begin, they discuss the project's theme for that year, they decide how long the concluding stay in the host families' homes should be and which children are to be guests in which families and lastly, what form the final presentation of the project should take. Absolutely essential to a successful exchange is a project which has been well-prepared in advance. Plans are made for the pupils to build or produce something, to plan and perform a circus or a theater presentation. During the exchange the children of both countries play, live and work together - as do the French and German teachers in their adult way. For both groups is is a very serious undertaking; they learn with the school class, but often outside of school, in „real life".

We would like to highlight the different settings in which learning occurred in this project and the varying activities of the children and of the teachers involved. These varying situations and settings are well-documented in two films about the project (Blohm/ Lenzen 1991, 1992).

- With regard to the settings where learning took place, this example is quite different from the preceding one - here the school opens up not just to the immediate environment, but to one far away from home. The pupils get acquainted with a different country, a foreign city, another culture, a foreign language, another school, and a family they did not know up until this time. The settings for learning are: the apartment of the host family, a recreational center, the other school and the area they visited.
- With regard to the kinds of activities the pupils engaged in: they acquired presents for their hosts, wrote letters, produced a portrayal of their own class in school, collected information about the city they planned to visit, and prepared the project together. Even though it seems like the program is quite remote from everyday school life, there are several activities that are integrated into school activities: for example, writing a diary, reporting about the day, writing letters, learning to read city maps and underground schedules.
- As to the teachers' activities: they explain, moderate, organize, structure, and they obtain the learning materials and the trip tickets. In sum: as teachers they are responsible for giving form to the entire process of learning. Besides these daily activities, they also have the chance to learn how to teach in two languages; and lastly, they learn how to profit from the educational styles of the other school's culture and how to cooperate in a binational team.

Both of the projects show that the opening of school can take place in a comprehensive way as well as in small steps. It can take place over a whole school week, over just one school day or

even in just a few hours. It can include the immediate environment of the school or a wider environment such as another country or even a global context. In each case the opening of school changes the location of learning of the school - but does not make school unnecessary.

Opening of School and Lifelong Learning of its Teachers

This presentation began with the idea that lifelong learning is made up of many different kinds of learning. Traditional school education is not enough - pupils must experience learning in school as a process with several aspects:
as learning to acquire knowledge,
as learning to act,
as learning to live together and work with others, and
as learning to be fit for life.

Opening of school, we might add now, makes such learning experiences enduring ones. Opening processes enliven and expand the locations for school learning, its methods, procedures and themes. It promotes learning to learn and motivates children and adults to continue to learn. Our experience shows that opening of school is not a basic alternative to school - as our videos show, even the most extreme opening process is based on solid school work. It is not an alternative to either „schooling" or „deschooling". The traditional opposition of „closed institution" and „open school" is in our view unproductive. In our experience, a much better way is to connect both traditional and open school forms and if possible, establish them as stable parts of the school program.

This is where creativity is required of the teachers. They have to learn how to facilitate the transitions between school and the opening of school, they need to be encouraged to try out changes in methods, to assume different roles as well as to delegate the role of teacher at times to others (and that is one of the most difficult things for a teacher to do!) Opening of school requires from the teachers a high level of and in many ways a new kind of professionality. „Open concepts of instruction", wrote one educator sceptically, „ obviously can only be used by highly qualified teachers" (Kasper 1995, P. 103).

We would like to formulate this a bit more optimistically: open concepts of instruction challenge teachers to learn and try out new procedures and methods in practice. Opening of school provides opportunities again and again for teachers to develop new methods in their subject area. It also allows them to develop and expand their own social competencies. In sum, opening of schools offers teachers the great opportunity to contribute all aspects of their own personalities to the program of a constantly changing school.

In conclusion: „Lifelong learning has become an existential question" (Negt 1997, S. 19), can aklso be viewed as an existential question for the profession of the teacher. Probably school is only able to transmit an idea of lifelong learning to the children when the teachers have the opportunity to experience this very same thing in their own professional field. Opening of school is one way in which all involved persons are given the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning.

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